

CROSS COUNTRY SKIER

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FALL TRAINING SPECIAL
WHISTLER OLYMPIC PARK
ROCKY MOUNTAIN
RANCH ROUND-UP
MEMORIES OF STOKELY CREEK
GRAYLING, MICHIGAN

What does it take to be a powerful, smooth, energy-efficient skier? A skier with rhythm and flow, gliding seamlessly from one movement to the next?

Just about any skier can become an energy-efficient gliding machine. To be smooth and yet powerful, to feel that your skis are an extension of your body, requires core-centered movement. Core-centered skiing means tapping into what Joseph Pilates referred to as the “powerhouse.” The powerhouse refers to the muscles of the torso: hips, abdominals, chest, back and shoulders. Pilates targets these muscles and can help you become a stronger, smoother and more powerful skier.

Skiing requires proper alignment, lower-body fitness, core strength and a strong mind-body connection. Muscle imbalances in the legs, such as tight or weak hamstrings, coupled with overly powerful quadriceps, can leave the ankles, knees, hips and back vulnerable to injury.

As a cross country skier, you’ll appreciate the additional core strength gained from Pilates. Tapping into a strong core, you’ll improve your balance, agility and be more in control. By tightening your core, you’ll reduce impact on your back, hips and knees. As you improve your flexibility and core strength, your alignment will improve and so will your technique.

If your hips and core muscles are not strong, or if your muscles are inflexible, you will be challenged every step of the way. Moving from your center, balancing your muscles and improving your flexibility go a long way to improving your

technique, your endurance and will help you avoid injury. Over the past 60 years, the Pilates method of body conditioning has trained athletes how to effectively strengthen and move from their core.

Pilates helps skiers to accomplish three things: prevent sport-specific injuries, improve performance and maintain longevity. Unlike a typical strength-training workout, Pilates doesn’t work legs today and arms tomorrow. It is designed to work your entire body uniformly each session. Pilates requires the participation of all the muscles. As you switch from one movement to the next, you’ll build flexibility, strength and stamina. Pilates strengthens and stretches all parts of your body, front to back, left to right and top to bottom.

An effective Pilates cross-training routine focuses on boosting core strength, improving flexibility and restoring muscle balance. Here are three Pilates mat exercises to help you get started. For a complete Pilates skiing workout, check out my book, “Pilates for the Outdoor Athlete,” at pilatesfortheoutdoorathlete.com.

The Hundred

This exercise warms up the circulatory system and prepares the heart for work. It strengthens the abdominal muscles, inner thighs and triceps.

① Begin by lying on your back with your knees bent to your chest and your arms by your side. Pull your navel to your spine. Inhale, lift your head, and curl up to your shoulder blades. Extend your arms by your sides and exhale straightening your legs out to 45-degrees. Pull your stomach tight as a drumhead. Squeeze your legs together as if holding a \$100 bill between your knees.

② Breathe deeply as you pump your arms by your sides as if slapping your hands on water. Inhale for five pumps, then exhale for five pumps, keeping everything still except for your arms. Avoid arching your lower

back. Avoid tensing your shoulders or holding your breath.

③ When you reach 100 pumps, bend your knees to your chest. Relax your head, neck, shoulders and arms down on the mat.

Leg Pull-Front

The leg pull-front will strengthen the shoulders, hamstrings, tibialis anterior and core; and stretches the calves and hip flexors.

① Begin in a push-up position, legs extended, with your hands under your shoulders and your heels over your toes. Pretend as though there was a candle under your torso and draw your abdominals in and up under your rib cage, knitting your ribs together.

② Inhale and lift one leg up toward the sky while pressing back through the heel of the supporting leg.

③ Exhale, lower the leg down, and bring your opposite heel back to center.

Double-Leg Stretch

This exercise strengthens the abdominal muscles and stretches the shoulders and the spine.

① Begin by lying on your back, hugging your knees into your chest. Lift your head and curl up to the base of your shoulder blades. Create a C-curl in your spine and look toward your belly. Pull your navel to your spine.

② Inhale and reach your arms and legs out at opposite 45-degree angles. Maintain your C-curl and keep your lower back on the mat. Make yourself into the shape of a hammock. Your eyes should be on your belly, not the sky.

③ Exhale, squeezing all the air out of your lungs as you sweep your arms out to the sides and hug your knees into your chest. Make yourself tiny like a ball. 

Lauri Ann Stricker is the author of the book “Pilates for the Outdoor Athlete.” She is the owner of Evergreen Pilates, and lives in the Colorado Rockies with her husband and son.

PILATES



The Core Centered Skier

BY LAURI ANN STRICKER

